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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"

Statement submitted by Solar Cookers International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

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Statement

Solar Cookers International would be honoured to participate in the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, as solar cooking and Solar Plus Solutions are a critical component to the empowerment of rural women, the eradication of poverty and hunger, and peace and development.

Cooking is fundamental to the lives of all people, and half of the world's population cooks over open fires. It is a daily task, repeated several times throughout the day, done mainly by women with children, especially girls, assisting.

Solar Plus Solutions includes a solar cooker, a heat retention basket and a fuel-efficient stove. When the sun is out, a solar cooker ought to be used. For the days when the weather does not permit solar cooking or when it is dark, a fuel-efficient stove is used. The heat retention basket increases the benefit of each of these and should be used with both.

The benefits of solar cooking and Solar Plus Solutions to women in particular include the following:

- The elimination of smoke, especially indoors, decreases the devastating health effects caused by smoke inhalation; the smoke inhaled from these fires is a leading cause of death and illness to both women and children.
- Cooking with the sun empowers women by alleviating the burdensome task of making and tending an open fire.
- Saving money from purchasing fuel (which can be as high as 30 per cent of total income) allows families to have more income to spend in other areas, invest in small businesses, send children to school or take care of medical needs.
- Cooking with the sun increases women's purchasing power and creates an economic place for women in society.
- In rural areas, people are no longer required to spend many hours and walk great distances in search of the fuel required to create open fires.
- Women and young children, mainly young girls, no longer risk attack, rape or worse, as they do each time they leave their villages to search for firewood.
- Fuel costs are lower, as the greater the distance travelled to obtain fuel, the more difficult it is to obtain and the higher the cost due to transit expenses.
- Fuel scarcity, which leads to conflict, creating a volatile and disruptive environment (or worse) for men, women and children in rural areas, is lessened.